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ABSTRACT

A proposal to place a limit, or ceiling, on college faculty incomes relies on voluntary participation. The sources of this plan and its limitations are discussed in terms of workload, salaries, and fringe benefits. (HSE)

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THE PROFESSORIAL VOCATION: A MODEST PROPOSAL

by

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The Professorial Vocation: A Modest Proposal

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When the first conference on the set of issues being explored here was held at USC under the leadership of Bob Linnell a year ago, one of the speakers voiced the following cri de coeur:

> Not long ago, the average citizen regarded the universities and their faculties as being on a higher plane than most other segments of our society. They were considered to be ethical, scholarly, interested in learning and knowledge and truth for their own sakes and thus different from other sectors of society which were regarded as mundane and self-seeking. In more recent times, however, our universities and many of their faculty members have begun to resemble other pressure groups, . . . seeking more grants and more money, more perquisites, and sometimes being quite arrogant about it. When this is coupled with possible conflicts of interest, self-enrichment, sometimes dubious or unseemly practices or outright abuse of the system, how can we expect to remain on the high pedestal where we once stood? To my mind this represents a great loss for an institution which for a very long time has been considered one of the most honorable and highly regarded pillars of our civilization. . . .

It is the same evolution of awareness experienced by Saul Alinsky when he was a young man teaching criminology in the thirties. Alinsky says that he thought for a year or so that professionals were superior to the grubby babbitts of commerce - but that soon he came to realize "the only difference between being in a professional field and in business is the difference between a ten-buck whore and a hundred dollar call girl".

The difference between the two statements, however, is this: Alinsky accepts without resistance the proposition that "beneath the executive's business suit, the butcher's apron, and the professor's academic gown beats the same selfish human heart," whereas Louis Levin, the author of the first set of remarks, wants to call his colleagues to return to a nobler vision of the scholarly vocation.

What is the crux of the problem we have in mind when we speak of the ethics of consulting? Different participants would doubtless define it is a variety of ways; I would put it this way:

> Is the prevailing pattern of individualistic entrepreneurship in the marketing of knowledge and skills by academics wise and just? Are the purposes ostensibly served by this pattern really well served by it -- or could they be served better by a different pattern?

Our culture is based on the theory that hustling pays. If it pays for enough individuals, who are rewarded handsomely for their extra ingenuity or diligence or luck, it will pay for society as a whole -- because the overall result will be a host of new discoveries that will benefit the great majority of the populace.

Well, it's a nice theory. Sometimes, indeed, it seems to work. Even its critics would allow that there is a measure of truth in it, so I don't suppose anyone is in favor of enshrouding the creativity of any professional group, including academics, with so many restrictions that very few people are motivated to hustle. Whatever policies we decide to enact in this area must avoid an excess of bureaucratic entanglements, and they must provide sufficient rewards for genuine inventiveness and competence so as not to discourage those who need pecuniary incentives. Moreover, it is only fair to acknowledge that consultant activities are a valuable stimulus to faculty growth, and a valuable source of contacts which benefit the university as well as the individual professor.

But I should like to ask, "Is it necessary to regard monetary incentives as a virtual sine qua non of intellectual dynamism, and is it accurate to assume that the benefits of hustling are worth the costs?" The theory is nice, but the actualities resulting from it are notoriously ambiguous.

In the first place, we all know that this theory is often disingenuously appealed to as a rationalization for irresponsibility. Neglect of students and of departmental or university chores is justified as the presumably regrettable (but not always regretted) side-consequence of devotion to research and the consulting "duties" deriving from the expertise generated by one's research. There may be occasions, of course, where such devotion is justifiable, but most of us give ourselves the benefit of the doubt in these matters much too easily. As a result, exceptional occasions of skewed effort become increasingly common until they become the rule rather than the exception. After a while, we have no qualms about postponing basic professional obligations indefinitely. One is reminded of some lines from Pope's Essay on Man:

> Vice is a monster of so frightful mien,
> As to be hated, needs but to be seen.
> Yet seen too oft, familiar with her face,
> We first endure, then pity, then embrace.

In the second place, even in those cases where temporary pigeonholing of routine responsibilities is justified by significant research achievements and related consulting activities, questions must be raised about the distribution of rewards. If a faculty member uses a large percentage of his time (that is, his or her hours on the job) over a period of months or years, and if he or she uses the research facilities provided by the university (its libraries laboratories, computer, etc.) to formulate a new theory invent a new process or develop a scholarly thesis of note, is the product of these labors exclusively his or her own possession?**

**There is no way to avoid annoyance in the use of gender - specific pronouns these days. In using "his or hers" at the beginning I have tried to signal my awareness of sexist language and its implications. Hereafter, for the sake of convenience, I shall only use one form.

And is income derived from the product exclusively one's own?

The practical import of this line of thinking is to open up a Pandora's Box of hitherto unexamined assumptions, taken-for-granted perquisites, and anxiety-producing questions. These all cluster around the basic query, "What is a university entitled to in return for the salary, fringe benefits and institutional base it provides for its faculty members?"

The general answer to that question is usually found in faculty handbooks which declare (as does the faculty handbook of the University of California at Berkeley), that use of time not constrained by specific responsibilities for classroom teaching, administrative engagements or other "commitments directly affecting other persons" is left to the discretion of the individual, to be allocated to "such activities as study, writing, research, committee service and public service." This generous policy is to be understood within the context of the university's assumption "that full-time members of the faculty are devoting their hours and energies (full 'working time') to the service of the University."

One of the speakers at last year's conference was of the opinion that this general answer to the question about the entitlement of a university was satisfactory "for most faculty members." We then went on to ask, however, "What is a week?" and "What is a day?" His answer to the latter question is, "For most professionals, including faculty members, it is clearly not eight hours in duration." This answer seems to be in keeping with the venerable image of the scholar to which we alluded at the beginning of this presentation, one which maintains that the university is entitled to expect experience, skill, intelligence, time, effort, motivation

and certain values in return for its investment in faculty.

It is probably important to attempt a quantitative answer to the question of how much of a professor's time in some sense belongs to the university. Let us assume that he does express his probable self-understanding as a slightly superior person in a sixty-hour work schedule. If so, is it fair for him to contend that twenty hours of work-time is his own investment of energy above and beyond the call of duty to his employer, twenty hours taken away from time he might legitimately have spent sailing, gardening or golfing -- and that therefore whatever is produced in those twenty hours of labor over a period of time rightfully belongs to himself alone?

An affirmative answer to this question concedes that the professor has the same attitude toward his job that a plumber has, perhaps, but it is a possible answer. But what about the somewhat different problem of calculating the university's investment in the output derived from the use of its facilities and secretarial personnel, supportive inputs which cost a great deal and which, in many cases, no individual could hope to provide for himself at his own expense? Is a faculty member justified in claiming that the use of these facilities is just one of the fringe benefits that come along with the job, a benefit which helps to make up for the disparity between academic salaries and salaries in other institutional systems where he might secure employment? If so, is this claim equally tenable in all fields -- or doesn't it carry far more weight in the case of the scientist, the engineer or the economist than in the case of the English professor? Or, considering the expensive hardware used by natural and social scientists, is the exact contrary closer to the truth? As a matter of fact, are these

arguments about personal entitlement to credit for all output and associated rewards beyond classes, committee meetings and a forty-hour week really arguments which can be advanced with a straight face by any conscientious professor -- or are they not rather patent rationalizations which need only to be dismissed with a smile?

One may try instead to give a very detailed answer to the question. If this route is taken, the list of specific inquiries to be made, and the list of stipulations to be entered into the contract between employer and employee get pretty lengthy. Consider, for example, some of the following questions (drawn from a paper on "Intellectual Property" by George Voegel at last year's conference, and from correspondence between Dr. Linnell and a leading Eastern sociologist):

-- Under what conditions has the individual "bought" himself a partner? What are the limits of such a partnership? How long will this condition exist?

-- Will the policy include patents and inventions, or will these be dealt with separately?

--What types of individuals or entities are covered or included in such a policy?

--Do procedures need to be developed separately from policy?

-- Should the policy differentiate between "equity in" and "ownership of"?

-- Is the recovery of development costs important before any sharing of income?

--Should a distinction be made between the regular academic year and the summer months (for those on a nine-month appointment)?

It may well be that participants at this conference should bite the bullet and endeavor to come up with some detailed calculations and recommendations which would answer the questions just posed. Perhaps, for example, we want to suggest that the "normal" work week for an academic is forty-five hours, of which fifteen can be spent in research, leaving fifteen of our putative sixty hours credited to the individual. This would suggest that any product of single-minded research over a six-month period characterized by this work-schedule would belong half to the university, half to the individual: fifteen of the thirty hours each week represent the investment of the individual, fifteen are a part of the university's share of his time. Formulae of this kind could be written into contracts, they could be surrounded by appeal procedures, and bargaining for slightly higher or lower percentage allocations could become a fascinating new diversion for faculty senates and university administrations. One can even envision a veritable cornucopia of doctoral dissertations on the subtleties of such matters for aspiring economists, sociologists and, yes, psychologists and philosophers.

To speculate about the complications of such an approach is already to feel an anticipatory sense of weariness. Perhaps it is a new frontier of negotiations into which we must venture; indeed, the Weberian assessment of the more or less inevitable logic of legal-rational authority would predict that developments of this kind are inevitable as the quasi-charismatic authority and the traditional authority of the professoriate decline, and as older notions of the noblesse oblige of the highly regarded intellectual or scholar fall into desuetude. Maybe that is where we are headed, and maybe it is unrealistic not to acknowledge this fact of gesellschaftliche life

and get on with the task of stipulating conditions and percentages.

There are two possible objections to this approach. The cynical objection declares that it will not work because most professors belong to the species homo economicus, and that they will respond to the market cue of lower rewards by producing less. The idealistic objection asserts that a traditional sense of professorial honor is still sufficiently alive to make possible a kind of short-cut that makes the detailed calculations unnecessary for many faculty, a short-cut that can be used to supplement the detailed schedule of commitments and compensations for many more.

The cynical objection may, in fact, be correct; it is certainly worthy of a serious hearing. It maintains that since confidence in the overriding importance of one's research, and a fierce insistence on independence in doing it, are essential to scholarly excellence, it would be counterproductive in the extreme to put an institutional or fiscal clamp on the research and consulting activities of professors.

It would predict that the most capable producers of scholarly goods will abandon an institution which sets odious ceilings on their earning power and surrounds their work with petty bookkeeping requirements -- that they will abandon the university and go to some other employer where they can get a better deal, or (in some cases) go into business for themselves. It would predict that the least capable producers, deprived of the pecuniary motivation to exercise their mediocre skills with some diligence, will settle for a different mix of satisfactions -- one in which leisure or non-academic forms of moonlighting replace the scholarly hustling whose main payoff for them was money, not professional pride or prestige.

(One can really whip oneself into a frenzy of alarm in contemplating the possible impact of a crackdown on this latter group, that is, the money-oriented mediocre hustlers. If their decision to put more time into hedonistic pursuits or non-academic moonlighting is petulant instead of cool, they might figuratively go on strike. If, in a resentful mood, they should look around and take note of the extremes of laziness and irresponsibility artfully practiced by some academics and tolerated by some universities, they might decide to see just how little they could do, and how poorly they could perform, and still get away with it -- with very serious negative consequences for the functioning of the university.)

Well, one would certainly hate to have to believe this nightmarish extreme of the cynical view. And I don't think many of us do believe it would have such consequences in more than a few individuals here and there. One would prefer to believe that a frankly idealistic approach would work with a large number of professionals, and that this approach could be used to supplement the reforms produced by the nuts-and-bolts calculation of rights and duties which might need to be carried out in tandem with it.

Whereas the nuts-and-bolts approach would involve externally imposed regulations, the idealistic approach I want to mention here would rely on internally imposed limitations. Specifically, it would mean that groups of individuals in various professional associations or universities would agree to donate a percentage of their income, or all of their annual income beyond a certain ceiling, to one or more trust funds set up for the purpose of improving the profession or the university concerned, so that they might provide better services to their clients.

Individual members of a particular field -- medicine, law, history, English -- or of a particular university organize themselves into a group which pledges its willingness to accept a ceiling on income (a ceiling which can be expressed in absolute or relative terms, and one which can be somewhat flexible in accordance with age, family size, etc.). Everything they receive beyond the ceiling is to be contributed to one or more funds for such desirable goals as, for example, subsidizing jobs in relatively undesirable locales or institutions where the need is as great as is the difficulty of attracting qualified personnel or, for another, upgrading effective affirmative action programs within a profession or an institution of higher learning.

The benefits of this plan are numerous. In the first place, esteem for the profession (at least for the individuals concerned, and for the profession as a whole in proportion to the degree it is supported within the profession) would rise, and suspicion of its seriousness of purpose and motivation would diminish. Secondly, if substantial amounts of money accumulated in the trust funds established by the donation of surplus income, a very substantial improvement might be made in the scope and quality of the services rendered to society. There might even be a sort of spillover effect on the moral climate of the nation as a whole, if there is such an entity, and if such effects on it are possible.

There are two answers -- better, perhaps, one two-part answer -- that may be given in response to the charge that such a scheme is hopelessly unrealistic.

The first part of the answer has to do with the precedent already established by the remuneration policies of numerous medical schools. In accordance with the theory that recognizes realistically the value to an individual of the institutional base, the access to clients and the prestige of a title furnished by a university, many medical schools now require their faculty members to turn over 10% of the first $10,000 earned in private practice, 30% of the next $20,000, etc. Now, it may with considerable plausibility be argued that the income level of medical school professors is already so high that they are out of our class -- that is, beyond the income category of most ordinary faculty members. (I suspect that this audience may be irritated at the very mention of medical school professors as a point of comparison.) Nevertheless, the precedent is there because the principle is clear: there is an income ceiling beyond which money is returned to the institution for expenditures which are presumably of benefit to the profession to which one belongs and/or the people one is dedicated to serving.

The second part of the answer to the charge of hopeless idealism is in the form of an implied mini-scenario concerning the implementatio of my modest proposal. Remember, to make this plan work we don't have to recruit a lot of faculty members at first; all we have to do (and all we have to be able to do) is to sign up a "remnant" of those who are already most secure, most idealistic, most curious, most rebellious, or for whatever reason are sufficiently motivated to enroll themselves. We are not asking, after all, for blood -- at least, we are only asking for a pint, because the ceiling can be made adjustable according to income, age, family size, etc., and all contribution can be made tax-deductible. If the remnant can be found -- particularly if there are quite a few big names in the list of enrollees, it will expand, because it will present a new

behavioral cue to professional academics about what constitutes appropriate behavior.

My use of the word "cue" says a lot about the theory of human behavior, and the theory of social change, which stand behind my proposal. I believe that what appears to be mercenary cynicism among upwardly mobile Americans, including academics, is less a matter of perversity than it is of timidity and inertia. We act no differently from hustlers in the marketplace because we are subject to the same cultural pressures toward consumerism, and to the same set of values which associate consumerism with success, even manliness and femininity. We think we have to have lots of money and buy lots of things and experiences because otherwise we will not be respected by our friends and associates.

But most academics -- even the most ruthlessly careerist -- have probably had some contact with a different value system which stresses higher notions of vocation and scholarly devotion. A majority of academics, I would conjecture, have actually internalized many features of this older value system, and because of that fact are actually somewhat contemptuous of the newer value system that stresses consumerism and superficial ideas of success and status. They cannot participate in it without embarrassment or, in many cases, guilt.

My proposal is based on the belief that the strong identification of a small number of academic intellectuals, especially if that number includes some unusually prestigious figures, with the older value system will pull others in the same direction. That's why I believe we can get the remnant, and that's why the remnant has a good chance to attract a fairly large number of persons in the teaching profession. New images of <u>virtu</u> have arisen and

triumphed at other periods of history; why can't the same thing happen today?